

THE PREEMINENCE
AND
SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST



Sermon Series Notes



Spiritual Growth – “How Not To Be Spiritual” (Colossians 2)

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INTRO: In the beginning of our study of this tremendous letter, we talked about the heresy that was infiltrating the church at Colosse. We need a reminder of this heretical teaching before launching into our text for today. It had within it the seeds of what later became known as Gnosticism. Gnosto means to know, and this teaching suggested superior knowledge, mystical knowledge. The teaching said that Jesus was an emanation. (All things are derived from the first reality or perfect God by steps of degradation to lesser degrees of the first reality or God, and at every step these emanating beings are less pure, less perfect, less divine.) They believed God was good and matter was evil. How could God create matter-evil? He couldn't, so He spawned off a whole bunch of sub-gods (emanations) and they kept going and going and going and going and going and going and finally started getting bad and got worse and worse and worse and then a really gross one created matter. And God became so far removed in this process that He had nothing to do with it. They believed Jesus was one of the first good emanations, and the bad ones were the demons. So between man and God was this barrier of evil demons and the only way you could ever get through that was to have super-knowledge through worship of the good emanations who could help you get through. That's why they worshipped angels, because they felt they needed the angels to crack through to get to the divine realm. They believed Jesus was one of those angels. He wasn't God, He was sub-god, an emanation. Some of them said He was a phantom, and that's why Paul emphasizes in this letter that Jesus had a body. Now, added to this weirdness, the heresy in Colosse also mixed in some Jewish ceremonialism, stressing observance of OT laws, including dietary laws, the Sabbath, as well as observance of OT feasts. Because Jewish leaders over the years had sought to meticulously protect The Law, they added “fences” around many aspects of the Law, ending up with a host of man-made religious traditions. Talk about confusing, and misleading! So Paul addresses the issues, and counters the heresy with plain old truth.

I. HELPFUL REMINDERS/FASCINATING TRUTHS (vv.1-15)

- A. Paul's Desire for Us to Have the Full Riches of Complete Understanding
- B. Paul's Realization of the Potential to Be Deceived by Fine-Sounding Arguments

* These arguments have their roots in hollow and deceptive philosophy that depends on human tradition, and the basic principles of this world.

- C. Paul's Reminder of Who We Are and What We Possess in Christ

1. Fullness of Deity (v.10)

- II Peter 1:4

2. Circumcision of the heart (v.11)

- Romans 2:28-29

3. Resurrection life (v.12)

4. Freedom from Law (v.14)

5. Victory over Satan and the power of evil (v.15)

- Heb.2:14

II. THE THEREFORE OF THE PRECEDING TRUTHS (vv.16-22)

A. Don't Return to The Shadows of The Law (vv.16-17)

* When he says don't let anyone judge you in these things, he simply means to not let anyone pressure you into heading in the wrong direction. There were people who were part of the church in Colosse who had been taken captive by some of these false teachings, and they were seeking to make disciples of others in the church.

* What we eat or drink; The Law categorized certain foods as clean and unclean (Lev.11:2-20). These distinctions were meant to stimulate the conscience between what is clean and what is unclean. But this dietary law was but a shadow, a shadow that pointed to a spiritual reality. And what was that reality? Dietary restrictions can never make me holy or bring me closer to God. See Mark 7:1-23. The Jewish rabbis took the letter of the Law and added tradition to it, so that the shadow became very faint, and the truth behind the shadow was lost completely.

* What makes me clean, pure, holy? Faith in Christ. But some people have a hard time accepting this truth. See Acts 10:9-16; I Cor.8:8; Rom.14:17.

* Note: Paul does not say that Christians should simply ignore personal diet for health reasons, only that OT dietary Laws were but a shadow of a greater reality, and that reality is found in Christ. Food or drink, either eaten or abstained from for the purpose of making me holy or bringing me close to God/Christ, is futile.

* A religious festival; all the OT festivals under the Law were shadows that relate in some way to Christ. The Hebrew word for feast means "appointed times." The first four of the seven feasts occur during the springtime (Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, and Weeks) and they all have already been fulfilled by Christ in the New Testament. The final three holidays (Trumpets, The Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles) occur during the fall, all within a short fifteen-day period. These have

yet to be fulfilled. In Passover, He is the Passover Lamb (I Cor.5:7); Feast of Unleavened Bread represents His sinless life; Feast of Firstfruits is fulfilled in His resurrection (I Cor.15:20); Feast of Pentecost (Harvest/Ingathering) is fulfilled by the coming of the Holy Spirit and the great harvest during the church age; Feast of Trumpets will be fulfilled by the rapture of the church (I Thess.4:13-18; I Cor.15:52); Day of Atonement will be fulfilled during the Great Tribulation when God purges Israel of sin and the whole nation is saved in one day (Zech. 12:10; Rom.11:1-6, 25-36). Feast of Tabernacles will be fulfilled when Jesus comes to rule and reign forever and ever (Micah 4:1-7; Rev.21:3). God will "tabernacle" with man. The tabernacle was a sanctuary where God was to dwell.

* New Moon Celebration

- The special enablement of the Lord is "opened" on the Sabbath and New Moon. It is YOUR CHANCE to get ALL that the Lord has available for you!! Why keep your back turned to Him in ignorance on the day of the New Moon when you can enjoy an extra measure of His presence - His enablement for the month to come. The bottom line here is that His SPECIAL ENABLEMENT is available to you ON THE ACTUAL DAY OF THE SABBATH AND NEW MOON! He says that during the six working days the "gate of the inner court" is to be shut, but on these two days, it is OPENED. This is your chance to "go up into the mountain" with Moses and the Lord Jesus Himself, the GATES ARE OPEN. The "key" word here is ENABLEMENT - and who wants it... There is only a small remnant of people whom He expects to find diligently PREPARING, as a bride prepares herself for the arrival of her betrothed. Are you one of them? Then take the opportunity that your Father has given you - seek Him when He "opens the gates to the inner court"...

- The New Moon celebration had to do with the Jewish calendar. In Gen.1:14 God said that the sun and moon were to serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years. The new moon speaks of a new beginning, but that new beginning under the Law was an endless cycle of repeated offerings that could never take away sin and clear the conscience of the worshipper. In Jesus we have a new beginning that frees us from sin, guilt, condemnation, and death. And when He returns we will experience another new beginning as He reconciles all of creation to Himself!

* A Sabbath Day. Sabbath speaks of rest, but the Jewish leaders have made it into a legalistic nightmare (see file on legalism, kosher elevators, etc.). Because of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, we can rest every day in His finished work.

* OT dietary laws, religious feasts, New Moon celebrations, Sabbath days are all shadows of greater realities, and those realities are fulfilled in Christ.

B. Don't Get Caught Up in Mysticism (vv.18-19)

* How is this false humility and worship of angels tied together?

* The Gnostics loved to act humble and say “We are not good enough to go directly to God, so we begin humbly with one of the angels, which, if we are in correct spirit, will elevate our requests through the hierarchy to God. They would regularly remind people of how much they had “seen” in the spirit realm.

* I have heard people go into great detail about what they have seen in the “spirit realm.” Lady pastor not long ago. And do you know how some people feel when they hear this kind of stuff? They feel unspiritual, because they have never experienced any of what they are hearing. But listen folks, people who go into great detail about their “spiritual experiences” are really full of pride. Their supposed humility is a false humility, and they have no connection with Christ.

* Note: The apostle Paul didn’t tell anyone of his vision of heaven for fourteen years, and then only because he was “driven to it” by the Corinthians in order to defend his ministry! See II Cor.12: 2ff.

* Truly Christ-like people are not proud...and the more they grow in their relationship to Christ, the more humble they become. Truly spiritual people call less and less attention to themselves. This is the mark of real humility. They do more than they say.

C. Don't Become Captive To Asceticism/ Legalism

* Gnosticism would end up teaching that if I deny myself certain pleasures, then I will become strong in my spirit and closer to the Lord as a result.

* Asceticism: The practice of severe self-discipline and abstinence from pleasure for religious or spiritual reasons. The ascetics of history have been really weird, .They believe that the body is evil. As a result, some monks regarded it a sin to take a bath, because they would see their body. They felt marriage was an experiment of the serpent which separates one from the Lord. Why? Because you would see somebody else's body. One ancient ascetic named Simeon Styletus was so holy that when he walked vermin dropped of his body. Some early church fathers in a fit of asceticism castrated themselves as an act of self denial, seeking by such actions to attain holiness. The ascetics were not allowed to touch their religious inferior. Simple diet, simple clothing were necessary for spirituality. There was a group years ago called “The Children of God” who believed the only spiritual people in the world were the people who sold everything they owned and join their movement.

* See I Tim.4:1-5

* Legalism: Excessive adherence to law or formula.

* Legalism looks down on people who don’t follow the same religious rules and guidelines that you follow. It can include things like drinking alcoholic beverages, hair and dress styles, whether a person goes to movies, following religious practices, etc. etc.

* Who had the most rules in Jesus' day? The Pharisees. Who were the most unspiritual in Jesus' day? The Pharisees. They fasted twice per week (including salt and pepper!), tithed meticulously, were faithful synagogue attendees, gave to the poor, observed all the religious feasts, did not hang out with sinners, and diligently studied the Scriptures. And Jesus said they were full of greed and self-indulgence. And they looked down on everybody who was not like them. They were legalists...and hypocrites!

* Note: There is an aspect of self-discipline, self-denial in the Christian life, but they are not the means of achieving spirituality, but rather the fruit of spirituality. This will be seen clearly in chapter three.

* Do not feed the flesh by seeking to crucify the flesh by rules regarding the flesh. Living by these kinds of rules and restrictions actually causes the flesh to be aroused in me. I begin to think so much about what I am not supposed to do that I end up becoming a slave to the very things the rules were meant to free me of!

* The Christian life is not a list of rules. My wife's Christian School had rules: Had to sign a contract! Don't go to movies; Girls couldn't wear pants; No listening to rock music, etc. I asked my wife what percentage of the kids in her school did she feel were spiritual. She said about 5%! She said the attitude was that if all this is just a bunch of do's and don'ts, who wants it!

* Do you think Jesus was a spiritual man? Some people, without realizing it, picture Jesus' spirituality in the context of their own ideas of what being spiritual looks like. That's what the Pharisees did, not only with Jesus, but with His disciples

* Jesus' "forerunner" was a hippie-looking dude with a wild diet named John the Baptist. The choices of his closest of his followers/designated leaders were shocking to the religious elite of the day (Matthew a tax collector, Simon a Zealot, Peter, etc.). He was condemned by the religious crowd because he "hung out" with publicans and sinners. He repeatedly broke the religious rules of the day (Sabbath days, touching dead people, lepers, talking to women in public - even a Samaritan woman! His disciples eating with unwashed hands, etc.). He did not follow the Pharisaical two day per week fast, and he seemed to really enjoy eating - He accepted a lot of dinner invitations! My goodness, He invited himself to Zacchaeus' house! He came "eating and drinking" and was accused of being a drunkard and a glutton, so we know he was not a teetotaler! His first miracle was turning water into wine at a wedding feast. He was anointed with the oil of joy (Heb.1), so He was the most joyous person ever! He was accused by the religious leaders of being demon possessed! But He was (and still is) the most spiritual person who ever lived!

CONCLUSION

* True spirituality cannot be judged by religious dietary laws. Dietary restrictions may make me more healthy, but never more holy. True spirituality is not achieved by observance of religious ceremonies, keeping of Sabbath days, or even strict self-denial.

Biblical spirituality is not a matter of external ritual but of internal relationship. True spirituality is measured by Jesus.

* The more spiritual a person becomes, the less you will hear them talk about their spirituality. The more spiritual a person becomes, the more free they will be from religious rules and regulations. The more spiritual a person becomes, the more practical their faith will be in meeting the needs of hurting people. The more spiritual a person becomes, the more they will reflect the character of Jesus Christ. And we will look more closely at this truth next week in Colossians chapter three.